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## Swamp warblers *Acrocephalus gracilirostris* and *A. rufescens* at Lake Chad, Nigeria

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This paper aims to clarify the status of two swamp warblers at Lake Chad, the Lesser Swamp Warbler *Acrocephalus gracilirostris* and the Greater Swamp Warbler *A. rufescens*.

While living at Malamfatori (13°37'N, 13°20'E) on the Nigerian shore of Lake Chad during 1968, R.J.D. noted *A. gracilirostris* in song from the time of his arrival at the end of February. This species

was fairly often in small numbers in lakeshore Cyperaceae and *Phragmites* in the vicinity of Malamfatori, but *A. rufescens* only rarely. The latter was normally confined to extensive areas of *Papyrus* elsewhere on the lake, such an ecological distinction being normal in parts of Africa where the two are sympatric. At Malamfatori in May 1968 R.J.D. ringed and netted four *A. gracilirostris* (and two *A. rufescens*) and has retained detailed notes of two of the *A. gracilirostris*. The five Lesser Swamp Warblers mentioned (under the name *Calamoceter leptorhyncha*) by Sharland (1969) in the ringing report for Nigeria, ringed to the end of 1968, presumably included these four birds netted at Malamfatori. Each of the two ringed by R.J.D. had a wing-length of 69 mm, and their weights were 12.3 and 12.7 g. Other measurements included tarsus 27–28 mm and tail 63–65 mm. These data accord well with those of six specimens of *A. gracilirostris* collected at Lake Chad by Boyd Alexander, and re-examined by Bates (1930). They also fall well within the range of *A. gracilirostris* at Jekara (Aidley & Wilkinson 1987) and that of 131 *A. g. leptorhynchus* ringed by R.J.D. (unpubl.) in southern Zambia: wings 58–74 (mean 67 mm) and weights 11.3–20.3 (mean 14.8 g). The weight data for the Greater Swamp Warbler at Jekara showed it to be 50% heavier than *A. gracilirostris*, with no overlap. In another area of sympatry in Kenya Britton (1978) also gave mean wing-lengths and weights of *A. rufescens* that were considerably greater than those of *A. gracilirostris*.

The Lesser Swamp Warbler is also listed by Dowsett (1993: 106) from Chad, on the authority of Salvan (1968). But it must be admitted that Salvan himself had as his only certain records of the two swamp warblers the type specimens collected by Alexander.

Through the kind cooperation of the Federal Fisheries research staff R.J.D. was able to make three voyages, each of three days, on Lake Chad in the boat "El Kanemi", between late June and early August 1968. He found both warblers in Chadian territory, with *A. gracilirostris* especially numerous locally. Separation of the two in the field was based mainly on the notably larger size and longer tail of *A. rufescens*; although the latter does tend to have a deeper voice, this distinction is not always evident (Dowsett-Lemaire 1994). Vielliard (1972) also found *A. gracilirostris* to be abundant on the Chad side of the lake, collecting no fewer than 22 specimens (compared to 4 *A. rufescens*, which he did not consider to be rare). We have no definite record from the Niger sector of the lake, although R.J.D. did notice that around Nguigmi (Nguimi) there was suitable habitat in 1968. The species presumably does not occur there now, with the retreat of the surface area of Lake Chad.

Alexander (1908) gave the locality for the type specimen of *A. gracilirostris neglectus* merely as Lake Chad, and the date as 5 December 1904. However, A.M. has been able to determine a more exact type-locality, from consideration of the details in Alexander's field notebooks (held in the Natural History Museum at Tring), together with the account of the Alexander-Gosling expedition to the Lake Chad area published by Alexander (1907a). Boyd Alexander and P. A. Talbot

began to survey and map part of Lake Chad in December 1904. A map published by Alexander (*op. cit.*) is marked with their route and a number of dates. Correlation of the dates and places with those given in Alexander's notebook provides an itinerary which is likely to be reliable.

Alexander's notebook contains for each bird collected his collector's number, the date and place of collection and some field observations. Warren & Harrison (1971) did not give the collector's numbers for these holotypes, nor are they in the BM register for the Alexander Collection (Mrs F. E. Warr pers. comm. to A.M.). The type specimen of *A. g. neglectus* in the BM bears Alexander's label with his collector's number 406; the entry in his notebook for no. 406 reads "Calamocichla ♂ Lake Chad 5.12.904 First observed in the Maria bushes. Breeding. Song like that of *C. brevipennis* . . .".

From 30 November 1904 Alexander worked the Yo area, from Kopichi (near Kukawa 12°55'N, 13°35'E), visiting both sides of the Yobe basin. He commented that the villages on the islands were cattle stations, inhabited for short periods only. The expedition did not cross to the eastern (Chad) shore of the lake until 10/11 December 1904. These dates accord well with those published for the various type specimens collected by Alexander during 1904–05 (Dowsett in prep.), November localities such as Kukawa and Yo being in the Nigerian sector of the lake and within a 40 km radius of Malamfatori. We would therefore clarify the type-locality of *A. gracilirostris neglectus* as "Lake Chad, Nigeria".

Alexander (1907b) did not give data for his type specimen of *A. rufescens chadensis*; its label bears the date 19 May 1905 and locality. This is given as "Wurmda" in Warren & Hastings (1971), but in Alexander's notebook and elsewhere written "Wunnda". The type specimen is also held in the BM and bears his label with his number 1094. His notebook records "1094 Calamocichla ♂ Wunnda 19.5.1905 Found in the depth of thick maria clumps. First time observed on Karraragga". From Alexander's published map Wunnda (13°30'N, 14°25'E) and Karraragga (13°22'N, 14°21'E), an area of "acacia, good pasture", are situated on the north shore of the eastern bay of the lake, in Chad.

Elgood *et al.* (1994) reported only one definite record of *A. gracilirostris* in Nigeria, from Jekara in Kano District (Wilkinson & Aidley 1982). At Jekara dam Aidley & Wilkinson (1987) caught and ringed 46. The Lesser Swamp Warbler was omitted from the first Nigerian checklist (Elgood 1981) through an oversight; it had been listed for the Malamfatori area by Hopson (1964), Dowsett & Hopson (1969) later adding *A. rufescens* to the local list.

Although Elgood *et al.* (1994) suggest that Greater Swamp Warblers in the Nigerian sector of Lake Chad "are possibly *A. r. chadensis*, though this has not been proven", there is no doubt of the type-locality. The question is perhaps rather whether or not *chadensis* is separable from the nominate race, which ranges from Cabinda to southern Nigeria. As pointed out by White (1960) the distinctions are slight, and presumably the range of the species is for practical purposes continuous.

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